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The rural home and the national
emergency. 1942

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Extension Service

*The Rural Home and
the National
Emergency*

Much of the information in this pamphlet was first presented in the form of an address by M. L. Wilson, Director of Extension Work, before the National Home Demonstration Council at Nashville, Tenn., October 21, 1941. Since the Nation has become an active participant in the second World War, the message has become even more appropriate than it was at the time it was given.



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The Rural Home and the National Emergency

With our Nation at war every family and every home has a responsibility in winning the war.

Farm women ask, What can we do?

The answer is, Start in the home. In time of war, home and family life become increasingly necessary. They must continue to serve as the fountainhead of inspiration, courage, and endurance.

The well-being of the community depends on the sense of security that can be developed and in knowing how situations can be met. Farm people, like other people, will have to know how to meet them. Intelligence and planning in the individual family will contribute a great part to the community effort.

With the demand for war materials will come many shortages in the things ordinarily used on the farm and in the home. Families may have to postpone for the time being the purchase of some things needed in the home. They may have to work longer hours to produce more food and fiber with equipment inferior to what it might have been if the war had not interfered. Many women will be doing men's work.

In addition, women will have to can and cure and preserve fruits, vegetables, and meats to make sure the family is adequately fed in winter. They will have to revise their meals after they look at the new nutrition charts and at what their garden and farm have to offer. They may have to save grease and fats for soap making, as their grandmothers did, so that sanitary standards of the family shall not suffer.

All this they will gladly do for the victory of our way of life. And this they can accomplish

best through leadership and community organization. Planning together how the individual family will carry on is important. Sharing with neighbors the information that leaders in the community have, becomes equally important now.

It is to the home that we look for spiritual strength. It is to the leaders of rural women that farm women generally look for inspiration. Today, more than ever before, such leadership is needed if we are to insure the ultimate victory that lies in lasting peace and justice to all mankind.

Today we have foremost in our minds the seriousness of the state of affairs abroad, its implications to us, and the part each of us can play in the effort to preserve our ideals of freedom and democracy and Christianity. There is a fundamental clash between the philosophy of Nazism, which exalts the state above family and individual, and democracy, which finds its greatest strength in the firm foundation of a system composed of many intelligent individuals—men, women, and children—capable of living an independent and happy family life.

Home Life and Morale and Defense

That is why the defense emergency requires a new emphasis on the close association between home life and morale. Hunger, cynicism, and discontent furnish the best seedbed for loss of faith in our democratic system and our Christian civilization. Surely the average worker in the factory, or the average farmer in the field, knows that his wages or cash returns for corn and cotton are not the only objects of his labor. It is simple justice that he have fair return for his labor, but unless his work provides a degree of happiness, plenty of the right food for his children, and a few of the better things of our culture for his wife and family, life becomes a mere round of plodding.

We know that the present world conflict is different from any previous international con-

flict in many ways. We are passing into an advanced mechanical age. Distances and old boundaries have disappeared. Old standards of value are fading rapidly. We are passing from a money age to an era of greater emphasis on resources, labor, and people. This fact was early recognized in totalitarian countries where, of course, people are important because the state needs them.

Income Alone Does Not Assure High Standards

The question is how far mankind can go and should go in the sacrifice of human values for the sake of mechanical perfection. Numerous factors may influence the final determination. Let us confine ourselves to a few possibilities in the rural field. The Extension Service saw its growth during that part of this century when industrial development and money economy, a kind of modern materialism, dominated much of the Nation's thought. To get more income regardless of the security of the family and spiritual values was often the only goal. Some assumed that if adequate income were provided, the good life was assured. Even in agriculture this theory found some fertile soil. We know the tragedies—the farm foreclosures and the loss of savings through speculation—that followed later. Perhaps we should not say tragedies after all, for agriculture in despair became one of the spear heads pointing toward a greater appreciation of the social values of life.

As a result of this money emphasis, which extended even into our farm life, the rural home did not come into its rich fulfillment as it should have, and as it must do if farming in America is to follow the pattern of rural democracy it started out to be. Agriculture today requires a highly intelligent type of farmer. And every intelligent farmer wants an equally intelligent wife who can make a satisfying home and take her place in bettering the life of the community.

Education and the Democratic Way of Life

Education is to the democratic way of life what food is to the body. Without education democracy becomes confused. As a safeguard we have innovated many educational services. One of the more outstanding of these is the Federal-State Cooperative Extension Service. Since its establishment under the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, the Extension Service has made some remarkable contributions to the building of rural leadership. Through taking part in planning and programs of work, hundreds of thousands of farmers throughout the country have not only increased their own stature as leaders in the community, but they also have helped to create much better production methods and higher standards of farm living.

It is a great satisfaction to look at the figures that show—inadequately, of course, for figures are always inadequate—what was done in home demonstration work last year. A total of 496,000 families learned to serve better balanced meals; 450,000 farm families made some improvement in their homes—on the building itself or its equipment; and 140,000 women and nearly 14,000 men participated in the child-development and parent-education program. Between 300,000 and 400,000 farm families learned to buy more efficiently and more wisely. Nearly 700,000 farm families received help in clothing problems. These are a few of the high lights. And there is the fine statement that 286,000 women gave generously of their time and energy to take training as local leaders in order that their neighbors might share in this educational program.

We live in a democracy, and we desire to preserve it as the American way of life. Therefore, let us consider two of the basic factors inherent in the democratic way. First of all, what self-help resources have we? One of our greatest resources is in the organizations of intelligent citizens devoted to educational prog-

ress and perpetuation of the democratic ideals. The National Home Demonstration Council is an outstanding example of this kind of organization; so, also, are the general farm organizations, such as the Grange, the Farm Bureau (including the associated women of the bureau), and the Farmers' Union.

In the main, the widely distributed local units of these organizations of rural people are officered and directed by rural men and women of broad vision and loyalty to American standards of government and ways of life. If, as the elected leaders of their organization, they recognize their responsibility to emphasize policies and activities that will enrich agriculture and rural life—with due recognition of the interdependence of agriculture, industry, and labor—then farm organizations can be listed as one of the truly great resources of our Nation. A second vital point: In a democracy we accept the fact that the strength of the Federal Government is determined by the strength or weakness of its individual States, counties, and citizens. Similarly, the strength or weakness of your National Home Demonstration Council is determined by the attitude, the program, and the services of each State and local home demonstration club throughout the country.

Three National Programs Need Extension's Support

There are three important activities that will need the wholehearted support of individual and organized farm women everywhere in this country for the duration of the defense emergency. One is the Agricultural Defense Program. Another is the National Nutrition Program. The third is the careful training of people who have enrolled with the Office of Civilian Defense for volunteer services.

These three activities, which I like to think of as the major defense assignments of agriculture, offer the most important challenge Extension Work has ever faced.

Nutritional Goals Vital to Agricultural Defense

The Agricultural Defense Program, also called the Food-for-Freedom Program, incorporates the nutritional goals as one of its vital parts. It also envisions wholehearted support by volunteer defense workers in town, city, and country. Under the broadest interpretation, all three of these major defense efforts become the food program of this emergency.

At the farm production end we may regard the State and County United States Department of Agriculture Defense Boards, under the national leadership of Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard, as the central clearing house.

Everyone now has a clear idea that the program calls for the largest total agricultural production this country has ever seen. Of all the farm programs we have had, the Agricultural Defense Program is the best thought out. More planning, thinking, and coordinating have gone into it than into any previous program.

The 1942 agricultural production goals are the most specific ever developed in any farm program. In order to reach these goals it is important that the full aid of the great educational machinery of the Extension Service be available to the defense boards and farmers in recommending and employing the most advanced production methods. I know that rural women are doing and will continue to do their part in making the farms of this country produce the vast volume of milk, cheese, poultry, eggs, pork, and other animal-protein foods that are needed. And in doing their daily tasks I know that many of these women will think of food for freedom in terms of bringing necessities to the rural women and their husbands and children of those nations we are committed to aid.

On the nutritional phases of the National Defense Program we now have our State nutrition committees and county nutrition committees. The State nutrition committees follow

in a large degree the pattern established by the extension services of numerous States when farm-family-supply committees were first organized. Extension nutritionists, Farm Security home-management supervisors, home economists from the land-grant colleges, vocational teachers of home economics, the public schools, public-health agencies, physicians' and dentists' groups, private welfare associations like the Red Cross, and food processors, handlers, and distributors have in the medium of the nutrition committees the opportunity to make their contributions to defense. The "enriched" bread and flour program, the school-lunch program, and the program of providing milk for school children—these and many similar efforts should all be a part of the greater nutritional effort known as the National Nutrition Program. In the civilian defense program also extension home demonstration agents, vocational home-economics teachers, and other professionally trained home economists will, I am sure, be called upon to assist in training defense volunteer workers in this matter of food conservation for better health.

The combined agricultural, nutritional, and civilian defense effort affords a made-to-order situation for bringing about a wider understanding of the newer knowledge in nutrition. The health of the Nation is its greatest source of strength. In other than the strictly military sense, nutrition and health are our first line of defense.

Home demonstration groups for 25 years have concerned themselves with health and nutrition. You women who have served as presidents or officers of your local home demonstration clubs and as nutrition leaders can render great help in extending interest and participation in the defense program. This means that each of you must resolve that in your respective communities every family shall be fully informed of the situation and the needs and how each family can contribute to the physical and spiritual defense of our Nation.

I have sketched briefly the importance of the immediate, all-out defense activities which Extension Work must regard as No. 1 on the docket. In the meanwhile, of course, we must continue in the various other fields of education that are essential in raising the standards of farm life. America cannot retrogress in this battle for the survival of democracy. It is a matter of going forward or stepping out of the picture. The situation is as serious as that. Momentary need for priorities may require dispensing with some of the gadgets and luxuries of modern life. In this respect we must be willing to make temporary sacrifice. But, by and large, we in Extension Work must dedicate ourselves to the principle that our continued existence as a democracy calls not so much for sacrifice as it does for greater service.

No doubt the greatest asset of home demonstration work through the years has been the progress made toward the long-time goal for which this work stands—the attainment of the highest kind of rural culture through making the home the center of farm life. Whatever special programs may stand out as important momentarily, all that is done points cumulatively to this end product in every county and rural community. The efforts of the women on the national staff in Washington are all directed to this end, and I am sure that most of you know something of the work that is being done in the fields of home management; child care, parent education, and family life; the 4-H Clubs; recreation; extension methods and results; and home industries, rural art and handicrafts as well as in the field of nutrition.

Setting wholesome living standards is not a matter of “keeping up with the Joneses.”

You as leaders of home demonstration work, are well aware of the fact that you help to set the standards of living in your State and community. Can we go home from this meeting and explain to other home demonstration women that if the farm family spends its increased income for the purpose of unnecessary

gadgets, such spending is in direct competition with the defense activities and will slow up our ability to send planes and war materials to Britain? I am sure that what we say on this question will have a far-reaching influence.

Management the Core of Success

It has been my observation that management—that is, the decision-making both in industry and on the farm—is the core of success or failure. Sometimes we overlook the fact that management by the farm woman is equally as important as management decisions of the farmer. How can we improve the management of farm homes? I think one thing is important: Get down on paper your farm and home financial plans for 1942. In making those plans you will be able to get helpful information on the agricultural and farm-family living outlook from your county extension agents.

Now that farm prices generally are back to a reasonably good balance with other prices, farm families will be finding that they will have more cash to spend. Decisions on how to use this cash should be made through family conferences. It will be important to make decisions carefully, since there will be many uncertainties to cope with in the future. Certainly part of the increased income should be used to provide the family with needed clothing, adequate food, and other essentials of family living. In localities where lumber and labor are still available, part of the income might go into fixing up the farmhouse. Part should certainly go into education of the children. If farm families are in debt, they will wish to speed up the paying off of back debts or mortgages. If they are free of debt, a portion should go into Defense Savings Bonds, life insurance, or other forms of saving to provide for post-war needs.

Today, everything we do has a bearing on defense. Here are just a few examples:

Throughout the country we have seen the

phenomenon of rapidly expanding populations in the vicinity of defense plants. Every effort is made to have these new populations resume as rapidly as possible the normal life they have been accustomed to. Thousands, however, continue to live in temporary, makeshift dwellings or trailer camps. It is highly desirable that farmers in the vicinities of rapidly expanding population once or twice a week hold markets at which people can buy farm-grown protective foods. Home demonstration agents in these areas can cooperate with marketing specialists and local agencies in seeing to it that farmers know of the new markets which such a situation offers and by participating in the local planning efforts designed to improve the home life of these people.

Take the matter of recreation and entertainment for service men. We are constantly being reminded that the civilian population should open its homes more to them. I believe that our rural homes offer good opportunities to join in this effort. Under plans carefully worked out, State and local rural-life leaders might be able to bring men in some of our isolated cantonments into more frequent contact with farm people.

Opportunities for Self-help

The results of the cotton-mattress-making program give us a glimpse of the tremendous opportunities offered in the all-out Agricultural Defense Program. The last statement I have on the mattress-making project is that, up to September 1, 1941, some 2,541,591 families had made mattresses in the local mattress-making centers. An appreciable number, perhaps, were doing nothing more than they always do toward helping themselves. But the vast majority of these families had not been much interested in the educational programs; they did not know about them, they did not think there was anything for them in the programs, or they did not care. Extension workers tell me that now, since a start has been made toward self-

help and great self-sufficiency, many of these 2½ million families are intent on going ahead with similar projects to make their own lives happier and more worth while.

One of the most popular extension projects in the country is farmstead and farmhouse beautification. It takes little money. Vision and initiative are all that are needed. With a bit of shrubbery here, a tree there, and a little grass seeded around the immediate environs of the dwelling place, the farm family can make the home place much more livable. Last year more than 148,000 farm families took part in this project.

Looking to the future, I believe the time is here when we must expand the better-family-living emphasis to the community and county. I think a lot of the community-center idea and the possibilities it offers. The fullest development of the local community center, however, requires planning, organization, and local leadership. It is here that extension home demonstration work can make a great contribution through education and stimulation of interest in such activities as better nutrition, home improvement, and civilian defense.

I am most appreciative of the enthusiasm and sincerity which local units of your organization and extension women in many States have contributed toward furthering discussion projects other than those dealing with home demonstration work. This is essential in democracy. What goes on in the local community, the State, and the Nation is as much a part of your business as the betterment of home life.

The cooperative spirit of home demonstration workers comes to my attention almost daily in the very fine relationships that have developed between the Extension Service and other Bureaus in the Department of Agriculture and State extension workers and other agencies in the State. The nutrition program, particularly, requires this kind of wholehearted cooperation with teachers in our land-grant colleges and vocational schools, with State and

county health workers, and many other agencies that have joined with the Extension Service in performing a vital, over-all, and team-work job.

The program of civilian defense which I mentioned and, therefore, the program of extension home demonstration agents, will undoubtedly include many activities other than educational work. These other activities will be concerned with normal daily living, for the front line of attack in this war is the front door of every home, whether in city, hamlet, or on the farm. Our homes need not only physical defense from without, but the kind of strength and defense that come from within. Positive health, sustained morale, self-set discipline, and willingness and ability to undertake additional tasks to meet the need of the hour should be a part of the defense program of each American homemaker. In the post-defense planning which will become an ever more important part of extension activity, we must include considerations of how we can make the advantages of the modern mechanical era a part of our homes, thereby making democracy the way of life most desired by other people in all parts of the world.

We live in a democracy, and what we do in Extension Work, whether in the State or Federal office, will reflect itself in the strength of democracy. The high-quality work done by home demonstration workers has already been most fruitful.

We look forward to a time when there will be a home demonstration agent in every county and an assistant home demonstration agent in every one of the larger rural counties. In the South and in areas with large Negro populations, we must also recognize the importance of Negro home demonstration agents.

Rural America Will Meet the Challenge

I believe the thought we might best take home with us is this: Although we are looking

into an immediate future filled with strain and anxiety, rural America will do its full part to meet the threat to our freedom and our way of life. This is the challenge to you and all those responsible for leadership to carry on the work with unselfishness, loyalty, and common-sense devotion to the task of building and training rural leadership through the medium of Extension Work.

You will, in the year ahead, have an opportunity to help where you frequently had little opportunity before. You will have to make adjustments in your own job. You will all have to conserve your energies as much as you can, considering the tremendous scope of the undertaking. But you have a wonderful opportunity to make next year, and the next, not only a much different farming year from those of the past, but also a much different and better year in reaching the broad goal of better living on the farm.

In conclusion let me endorse heartily the words of our far-seeing pioneer leader of Extension Work, Seaman A. Knapp, who said: "A rural home with a father and mother of gentle culture is Nature's university, and more richly endowed for the training of youth than Yale or Harvard."

I salute you, rural women of America. The Nation has need for your vision, your courage, your steadfastness, your ability. I bid you hold fast the faith!

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